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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on 14 June 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ferrari ..... (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

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07-38228 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Special Committee decision of 12 June 2006 concerning Puerto Rico (*continued*)
(A/AC.109/2007/L.3 and A/AC.109/2007/L.7)

Hearing of petitioners (*continued*) (Aide-mémoire 05/07 and Add.1)

2. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Grady Flores (Ithaca Catholic Worker Vieques Support Group) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

3. **Ms. Grady Flores** (Ithaca Catholic Worker Vieques Support Group) said that, as a member of the Christian Peacemaker Team, she had participated in the non-violent struggle in Vieques, Puerto Rico, to stop the 60 years of bombing of the island by the United States Navy. In April 2007, she had travelled to Palestine with a delegation of Puerto Ricans for a conference on non-violence and popular resistance in the village of Bil'in, which had had 60 per cent of its lands cut off by the apartheid fence erected by the Israeli military.

4. There were many parallels between the two struggles, including the confiscation of lands, forced removal of people, demolition of houses, building of walls and fences, holding of political prisoners and cutting people off from their land, sources of food and access to travel. Israel tested its new weapons in Palestine. Vieques had been the military proving ground of weapons on a larger scale.

5. Depleted-uranium-tipped shells were prized for their ability to penetrate armoured tanks and other heavy military equipment, cutting through metal like soft butter and producing fine radioactive dust. When that dust was inhaled or ingested, it hid in the lungs, kidneys, large organs, bones and muscles, causing many illnesses and genetic deformities resembling those found among the victims of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United States military had been aware since the 1940s of the dangers of depleted uranium weapons, including heavy metal toxicity and cell mutations leading to cancer and birth defects.

6. Although the United States Navy had admitted to firing "only 263 rounds" of depleted uranium shells in 1999, Ismael Guadalupe, who was at the meeting, had witnessed first-hand the signature piercing of tanks by depleted uranium shells back in 1994. Moreover, the United States Navy had used the A-10 Warthog fighter plane, which could fire 9,500 rounds of depleted-uranium-tipped bullets in one minute, and nuclear engineer Frankie Jimenez had found 11 radioactive hot spots in the Navy bombing practice zone.

7. She urged the Special Committee to consider such evidence of blatant disregard for human life and well-being, and to recognize the need for the self-determination of the Puerto Rican people.

8. *Ms. Grady Flores withdrew.*

9. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Muriente Pérez (Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

10. **Mr. Muriente Pérez** (Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano) said that since its invasion of Puerto Rico some 109 years earlier, the United States had not taken a single step to advance the island's decolonization. On the contrary, it had strengthened control over all facets of Puerto Rican life. The current status of Puerto Rico as a Free Associated State — a fraud that had been promoted as a decolonization process — had never been legitimized by the international community. His delegation demanded that all powers should be transferred to the people of Puerto Rico in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) so that they might freely decide their destiny.

11. The political status of Puerto Rico must be determined by Puerto Ricans themselves through the establishment of a broad, representative and inclusive constitutional assembly on the status of the Puerto Rican people. Such an assembly would enable the people to overcome their current colonial condition and forge a national consensus, which would force the United States Government to assume its responsibilities. He therefore called on the Committee to support efforts by the people of Puerto Rico to secure their liberation, by adopting the draft resolution concerning Puerto Rico that requested the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively in all its aspects.

12. *Mr. Muriente Pérez withdrew.*

13. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Brassell (United for Vieques, Puerto Rico, Inc.) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

14. **Ms. Brassell** (United for Vieques, Puerto Rico, Inc.) said that as a member of Grandmothers Against the War she had worked towards peace in Vieques, Iraq and elsewhere in the world in collaboration with activists spanning many generations. Although the bombing of Vieques by the United States Navy had been halted four years previously, the people of the island were still awaiting the fulfilment of their four demands: demilitarization; decontamination; devolution; and development.

15. With respect to demilitarization, while the bombing had ceased, unexploded ordnance remained, and as they were exploded they continued to contaminate the environment, placing the lives and health of the people of Vieques at risk. Decontamination efforts in Vieques had been stalled repeatedly. The United States Navy failed to shoulder its responsibilities for the clean-up, while the people of Vieques had been left out of the decision-making process in that regard. Furthermore, the Navy still maintained a relocatable over-the-horizon radar station on Vieques, which was powerful enough to alter weather patterns.

16. Concerning devolution, the people of Vieques continued to be shut out of decisions regarding the use of the land, which was still under the control of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The land had been fenced off and the community denied access. As for development, the economy of Vieques had deteriorated in the four years since the end of the bombing. The rush by developers and speculators to buy up property, land and businesses was pricing the people of Vieques out of their homeland. Unemployment was on the increase and many people had no choice but to leave the island.

17. She appealed for the support of the Committee and the international community in helping the people of Vieques to achieve peace and justice through complete demilitarization, including the closing of the radar station, the end to detonation of live bombs by the United States Navy, the decontamination of all the land and waters and the return of the land which rightfully belonged to the people of Vieques.

18. *Ms. Brassell withdrew.*

19. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Santos (Organización Autonomista Pro Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (PROELA)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

20. **Mr. Santos** (Organización Autonomista Pro Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (PROELA)) said that, as the oldest colony in the world, Puerto Rico was calling for immediate emancipation from the yoke of colonialism.

21. The United States had taken possession of Puerto Rico in 1898. In 1953, with a view to removing itself from the list of countries with dependent territories, the Government of the United States had granted the island a measure of autonomy in the form of a new Constitution. However, since then, Puerto Rico's attempts to further its own interests had been systematically quashed by the federal Government. Indeed, that Government continued to deny the people of Puerto Rico their right to self-determination, thereby violating international human rights law. In that connection, immediate action must be taken to free Puerto Rican political prisoners, decontaminate Vieques Island, and put an end to the repressive acts carried out by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

22. At the socio-economic level, Puerto Rico was almost entirely dependent on the United States, a situation that severely hindered and complicated the process of self-determination. In terms of trade, the island was isolated from the rest of the world; unemployment stood at around 20 per cent; and Puerto Ricans were constantly emigrating in search of better opportunities.

23. On 25 April 2007, the United States Congress had been informed that, under the Territorial Clause, Puerto Rico was subject to its authority, and that it could do as it wished with the territory of Puerto Rico. Fifty-four years after having claimed that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony, the United States was now admitting that the island belonged to it. The United Nations must therefore work to bring about the speedy eradication of colonialism. Accordingly, the General Assembly should consider the question of Puerto Rico as a separate item.

24. *Mr. Santos withdrew.*

25. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Rodríguez Banchs (Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

26. **Mr. Rodríguez Banchs** (Frente Socialista de Puerto Rico) said that the Bush Administration had made it clear that Puerto Rico remained a United States colony. Indeed, critical areas of the island's life, such as defence, international and diplomatic relations and trade and immigration, were still governed by United States laws. While the United States had signed and ratified a number of International Labour Organization conventions designed to protect workers' rights, many of those rights, including the right to collective bargaining, to freedom of association and to strike, were systematically denied in Puerto Rico, and members of trade unions were frequently persecuted.

27. Although the promulgation, in 1953, of the Puerto Rican Constitution had been cited by the United States as evidence of the island's independence, attempts by the federal Government to impose the death penalty, a punishment expressly prohibited by that Constitution, illustrated the ongoing colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. A further example of that relationship was the recruitment of young Puerto Ricans by the United States Army: many of the island's young men were currently fighting in the illegal war against Iraq.

28. In closing, he expressed particular appreciation to the representatives of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for sponsoring the draft resolution and called for the unconditional release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners.

29. *Mr. Banchs withdrew.*

30. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Colón Almenas (Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

31. **Mr. Colón Almenas** (Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico) said that, for the past 110 years, Puerto Rico had been subjected to the political, military and economic rule of the United States of America. Although the General Assembly had, in its resolution 748 (VIII), recognized that Puerto Rico had attained the status of an autonomous political entity, the colonial relationship between the United States and the island persisted.

32. All attempts to resolve the situation had failed, and many who had protested against the ongoing dominion of the colonial Power had been persecuted, incarcerated or even assassinated. Environmental degradation, repeated violations of human rights — including the federal Government's attempts to introduce the death penalty — use of Puerto Rican territory for military exercises and forced participation of many Puerto Ricans in wars waged by the United States were but a few examples of the negative effects of colonial rule.

33. Based on General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), which recognized the right of all peoples to self-determination, he called for the immediate transfer to the people of the sovereign rights that had been illegally seized from them, noting that the situation in Puerto Rico was a ticking time bomb.

34. *Mr. Almenas withdrew.*

35. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Zayas López (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

36. **Mr. Zayas López** (Gran Oriente Nacional de Puerto Rico) called for the granting of independence to Puerto Rico, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). The United States must recognize Puerto Ricans' inalienable right to self-determination and desist from attempting to exercise control, by means of repressive acts and the use of force, over every aspect of the island's life.

37. He also called for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners and for the discontinuation of the harmful clean-up methods being used on Vieques Island. While any decision on final status must be taken by the people of Puerto Rico themselves, the Committee could use its influence to urge the Government of the United States to allow Puerto Rico to exercise its rights to sovereignty and independence. In that connection, he hoped that the General Assembly would consider the question of Puerto Rico, in all its aspects, as soon as possible.

38. *Mr. Zayas López withdrew.*

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.7

39. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to take a decision on draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.7, which had been introduced by the sponsors at the previous meeting.

40. **Ms. Joseph** (Saint Lucia), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the letter reaffirmed its position on the question of Puerto Rico, as contained in the final document of the Fourteenth

Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement and called upon the United States Government to allow the Puerto Rican people to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and to return the territory and occupied installations on Vieques Island and at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station to them.

41. The Non-Aligned Movement called for the prompt implementation of all the resolutions on Puerto Rico adopted by the Special Committee and expressed the hope that the draft resolution before the Committee would be adopted without a vote.

42. **Mr. Anzola Quinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) reiterated his Government's position that Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and independence should be respected. That was the position taken also in the final document of the Fourteenth Summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and in the "Panama Proclamation", issued by the Latin American and Caribbean Congress for the Independence of Puerto Rico.

43. He drew attention to the seventh preambular paragraph and to paragraphs 2 and 7 of the draft resolution and called for its adoption by consensus.

44. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) observed that the question of Puerto Rico had been under consideration for 30 years and that a total of 24 resolutions on the issue had been adopted; in recent years, they had been adopted without a vote. He drew attention to paragraph 8 and expressed the hope that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

45. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed support for the draft resolution and requested that it should be adopted without a vote.

46. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2007/L.7 was adopted by consensus.*

47. **Mr. Malmierca Díaz** (Cuba), speaking in explanation of position on the draft resolution just adopted, said that he was particularly pleased that the resolution explicitly requested the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively in all its aspects.

48. The Cuban and Puerto Rican people were bound together by a shared history. Both countries had been Spanish colonies and both had suffered military intervention from the United States in 1898. The Cuban people would never forget that some 2,000 Puerto Ricans had shed their blood on Cuban battlefields during Cuba's struggle for independence. Cuba would continue to uphold the legitimate right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination and independence.

49. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Observer for Nicaragua) said that it was unjust that Puerto Rico should be excluded from the decolonization process. The United Nations must continue to consider the question of Puerto Rico until the latter achieved full independence.

50. His delegation was pleased that the United States Government had stopped the bombings and military exercises on Vieques Island; however, it remained concerned at the unfortunate situation of the inhabitants of Vieques Island and the impact of the military exercises on the local environment. It looked forward to the day when Puerto Rico would assume its rightful place in the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.